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ABSTRACT

This document reports successes of San Antonio's private, nonprofit Avance program in promoting enrollment in classes by low-income Hispanic mothers of infants or young children. Also reported are outcomes of attempts to identify predictors of course-taking. The Avance Parent-Child Education Program is a 9-month, comprehensive, center-based program with an in-home component that offers parenting education and family support to parents and their infants and toddlers. A major objective of the program is to help low-income Mexican-American mothers obtain more education so as to optimize the mothers' vocational abilities. A total of 52 program participants were compared with 110 controls at two sites. Measures for the purpose of predicting educational enrollment included program status, residential site, education, age, marital status, number of children, depression, mother's employment, progressive or traditional values, acculturation, social supports, and knowledge and use of community services. In comparison with controls, women who participated in the Avance program were more often enrolled in or had more often completed the general educational development (GED), English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL), or other courses. Program participation did not result in group differences in number of women employed. Prediction of enrollment in courses from intake data was dependent on participant's site and group. (RH)

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ENHANCING THE VOCATIONAL PROSPECTS OF LOW-INCOME HISPANIC MOTHERS: RESULTS OF A FAMILY SUPPORT PROGRAM

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A major objective of the Avance Parent-Child Education Program second year is that the vocational abilities of low-income Mexican American mothers be optimized by helping the women to obtain more education. 52 program participants were compared with 110 controls at the end of the program. Significantly more program women had enrolled in courses. Prediction of enrollment in courses using intake data was dependent upon site and group.

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Enhancing the Vocational Prospects of Low-Income Hispanic Mothers: Results of a Family Support Program

Poverty, and associated problems such as school failure, child abuse, child behavior problems, and teen pregnancy, continue to be a prominent part of life in America. Hispanic families are too often impoverished and often have the additional difficulty of having limited skills in the majority language. Poverty has increased in the past decade, and there are few signs of improvement.

Parent education and support programs have been developed to provide one response to this continuing problem. Some of these programs have focussed on helping low-income parents to be effective teachers of their young children and on providing a variety of supports to families so that they might be able to employ these new skills. There is evidence that some of these programs have been successful in achieving certain of their goals. For example, the Houston Parent-Child Development Center (H-PCDC) has demonstrated a reduced incidence of behavior problems and improved school performance of children of participating families (Johnson and Walker, 1987; Walker & Johnson, in press). An important limitation was that it did not attack directly a key part of poverty: low-income. Families were not provided with training or assistance in improving vocational skills, and a recent, unpublished, follow-up of the H-PCDC indicates that occupational status and level of poverty were not affected by the program and that the early gains in behavioral and educational functioning of the children had dwindled. These results, and they are not unique for parent education programs, suggest that a more direct approach to resolving the problems of continued low-income is needed.

The Avance Parent-Child Education Program is such a response. It was designed to help low-income Mexican American mothers of infants develop their child care skills and to optimize their own prospects for satisfactory employment. The first year of the program focuses on child rearing and child care activities through center-based classes and in-home visits. The second year is designed to help the mothers identify areas for personal improvement and to meet their goals through enrollment in a variety of educational courses. It is assumed that having completed appropriate courses that prospects for obtaining employment will be improved, and that with employment, or higher level employment, family income will increase. This increased family income will, in turn, provide a necessary support for the family to carry out other essential parental functions, such as preparing children for school and monitoring school performance.

The Avance Program

Avance-San Antonio was established in 1973 as a private non-profit, community-based organization in San Antonio, Texas, to serve predominantly low-income Hispanic families.

Theoretically, it was based largely on ecological analyses such as may be seen in the work of Bronfenbrenner (1974, 1979). The Avance family support and education programs now serve approximately two thousand families annually in San Antonio and Houston.

The Avance Parent-Child Education Program is one of six programs offered by Avance to mothers, fathers and children who are at-risk for school failure by virtue of their income, education, and other social characteristics. Recognizing the importance of addressing the needs of the entire family, Avance has developed an umbrella of services designed to provide education and support to all members of the nuclear family. The centers involved in the present evaluation are located in two different communities: one in a federal housing project and the other in a residential low-income neighborhood. In the current evaluation, about half of the participants are married, have about 9 years of education, have a monthly income of about $500, have 2.5 children and many were born in Mexico.

The Avance Parent-Child Education Program is a nine-month comprehensive center-based program with an in-home component offering parenting education and family support to parents and their birth to two-year-old children (See Table 1). The mothers and children are transported to weekly three hour classes held at the facility closest to them. At the Avance Center parents make educational toys, receive lessons in child growth and development, and learn about the many social services located in the community while their children are in the Avance Day Care Center. In addition, parents are visited once a month at home. The parent-child dyad is observed in a play situation with an Avance toy during which time the home visitor emphasizes to the parent the importance of her role as a teacher and effective caretaker. The visit is also used to provide the mother with individual assistance and support. Field trips and enriching experiences for the family are also provided. All of the Avance services are delivered by an understanding staff who are from the community and the majority of whom are previous Avance participants. Some mothers choose to continue with the Avance program for a second year. During this time they attend courses for English as a Second Language (ESL), work on the high school equivalency exam (GED), take junior college courses, or otherwise develop their vocational skills. Avance assists those women who continue in the program through the provision of childcare for their preschool-aged children during classtime and transportation to and from classes.

This paper reports the success of the Avance program in promoting enrollment in classes by low-income Hispanic women, all of whom are mothers of infants or young children. In addition, the paper reports the results of our attempt to identify predictors of course-taking.

Method

Participants were low-income Mexican American mothers of infants. Results reported are for 52 program and 110 control participants. Of this total, there were 26 program and 54 control participants at the Southside and 26 program and 56 control participants at the Westside.

The project was carried out in two sites in San Antonio. Southside tended to consist of recently immigrated women, who had little formal education, and who lived with their spouses in single family residences. Westside women all lived in public housing, tended to have more education and to be more acculturated, and to live alone with their children. Randomization was used at Southside and a matched group design used at Westside. The success of group assignment was assessed by comparing program and control groups at both sites on a large number of demographic and evaluation pre-test measures. No differences were found between groups that would be expected to bias outcome results. Evidence for differential attrition from groups was also examined, and again, no differences were found.

Data were collected for two annual cohorts of Avance participants; however, this report deals only with the first cohort.

All data were collected by a bilingual interviewers. Educational enrollment data were collected at the end of the second year of the program.

Measures

Measures included to predict educational enrollment were program status, residential site, education, age, marital status, number of children, depression, mother employment, progressive values, traditional values, acculturation, social supports, and knowledge and utilization of community services. Data collected at entry into the project were utilized for these analyses.

Acculturation Rating Scale for Mexican Americans (ARSMA)

The measure used was an adaptation of the Acculturation Rating Scale for Mexican Americans (ARSMA) developed by Cuellar, Harris and Jasso (1980).

Intake Interview

This interview was designed to provide background information about the mother and the people in her household. The interview includes information on the mother's occupation, education, income, need for and use of medical services, early experiences with her parents, language preference, place of origin, and marital status.

Hollingshead Four-Factor Index of Social Status (SES)

The four factors are education, occupation, marital status, and sex. This index was used because it provides a score for families whether one or both parents is present (Hollingshead, 1978). Information for this index was gathered as part of the Intake Interview

Life Events Schedule

The abbreviated version of the Holmes and Rahe (1967) Social Readjustment Rating Scale Developed by Abidin (1983) was used with further adaptation for the Avance population. It consists of 24 items, each of which is answered in binary form. Only negative life events were used.

Parental Modernity Scale (PM Scale)

The original PM Scale, developed by Schaefer and Edgerton (1985), consisted of 30 items each of which had 5 response points: Strongly Disagree, Mildly Disagree, Not Sure, Mildly Agree, Strongly Agree. For use in the Avance evaluation, the number of items was reduced to 16. Items were deleted if they seemed redundant with other items or if the content was not clear. The items deal with traditional vs modern attitudes about how children learn (e.g., they learn passively or actively) and with the relationship between parents, teachers, and children.

Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale

The scale consists of 12 items each of which is responded to on a 4-point scale from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree." Rosenberg (1965, 1979) has divided the measure into submeasures having to do with feelings of worth, ability to perform, self-satisfaction, and reactions to criticism.

Parent Self-Efficacy Scale (PSE Scale)

The PSE was used to assess the degree to which the mothers believed that they were competent as parents. The 7-items of this questionnaire have 6-point Likert-type scales which range from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree." This measure was designed especially for parents by Gibaud-Wallston (1977) and Gibaud-Wallston and Wandersman (1978).

Center for Epidemiological Studies-Depression Scale CES-D

The CES-D is a measure of depressive feelings that has been widely used in survey research (Radloff, 1977). This 20-item self-report scale asks about feelings of sadness, enjoyment of life, and relations with people. Responses are to 4-point scales based on amount of time the subject feels that she has had the experience.

Arizona Social Support Interview Schedule

An interview developed by Barrera (1980) was used to obtain information about the mother's support system in the following areas: 1) personal issues, 2) borrow money, 3) care. The interview includes questions on names of supporting individuals, their relationship to the mother, how satisfied she is with the support, and the extent to which she made use of the support. Barrera's method was adapted for use with Avance by adding the child care question and omitting several minor features.

Utilization of Community Services

Social services agencies available to families in San Antonio were listed and the mother was asked to indicate the ones she knows about (Knowledge) and the ones she has used (Utilization). Items were selected to include services available to low-income families in San Antonio.

Family Update

This interview is a follow-up of the Intake Interview to record changes in family in the home, employment status, marital status, housing arrangements, and enrollment in classes.

Results

Women who participated in the Avance program at both sites were significantly more often enrolled in and/or completed GED, ESL, or other courses, $X^2(1, N = 162) = 14.04$, $p < .0002$. Results appear in Table 2. At the Southside, 73% of program women compared with 41% of control women took classes, $X^2(1, N = 80) = 6.11$, $p < .013$. At the Westside, 58% of the program women and 25% of the control women took classes, $X^2(1, N = 82) = 6.93$, $p < .008$). There was also a tendency for women in the Southside area to enroll in classes more often than women in the Westside area, $X^2(1,N = 162) = 3.54$, $p < .06$.

The kinds of classes taken by women in each group are shown in Table 3. GED classes were most popular, followed by English as a Second Language (ESL), and college, with pre-GED and citizenship classes last.

Classes were taken through a number of community agencies by women in both groups. These included community colleges, public schools, churches, and libraries.

Women rated their satisfaction with the courses as very high for both groups, and the groups did not differ in these ratings. Women in the Avance program, but not the control group, were also asked whether they had received support from family members for taking classes. In general, support was high at both sites. Some women reported that what had been a neutral reaction by family members to their participation in classes intially changed to favorable at the end of the year.

Participation in the program did not result in group differences in number of women employed, $X^2(1, N = 132) = 2.64$, $p < .10$. Differences in employment rates were not expected at this follow-up period.

Demographic characteristics and test scores taken at entry into the project were used to predict enrollment in classes during the second year of the program. The results were complex, with different patterns emerging depending upon the woman's program status and residential site. The significant correlations appear in Table 3. As the results do differ by site and group, interpretation is limited to relationships obtained within each group and site.

The patterns of correlations differed greatly for the four site by group categories. These differences raise the question of whether the correlations occurred by chance. However, as there were 88 correlations and 14 (16%) were significant, that possibility, although not ruled out, seems unlikely. More likely the site and group status differences have real effects on predictor variables. Living in the Westside community was to live in deeper poverty and to be

closer to homelessness. With high poverty levels and drug-related crime prevalent, day-to-day life was more precarious. Southside families enjoyed the greater privacy and security of living in single-family dwellings and more often had husbands present. These families were also more often recent immigrants to the United States.

Program interventions are designed to have an effect on ordinary relationships and sometimes do (Johnson, 1981). How these appeared in the Avance evaluation may be seen by comparing correlations for program and control groups within sites, and assuming that the control group relationships are the "normal" relationships. For the Southside, level of depression was the only predictor, and a higher level of depression may have acted as an inhibitor of class enrollment. In the program group, this was not relevant, but those who took classes were less acculturated and held more traditional values (that is, they were more likely to be recent immigrants from Mexico), had more education, and had more knowledge about community services.

At the Westside, control women who took classes were younger, had fewer children, were more likely to utilize community services, and had more traditional values. Westside program women who continued with classes had more education, had larger utilized social networks, and had had more negative live events in the past 6 months.

Discussion

The Avance parent and child education and family support program has as one of its major goals that women participating should have an opportunity to increase their educational level and thus, improve their chances of obtaining employment. This, in turn, is seen as an important step toward breaking a cycle of poverty. The current evaluation of the effectiveness has demonstrated that mothers participating in the program from two different locations in a southwest city have more often enrolled in courses than women in control groups who did not have access to the Avance resources.

Employment is still in the future for the women in this study; most were unemployed during the project, and increased employability was expected to follow course-taking. When Hispanic women do seek and find employment, other factors having an impact on the cycle of poverty may come into play. For example, Johnson (1975) found with a very large sample of Hispanic women in the southwest, that the single best predictor of fertility reduction was obtaining employment. Fewer children may make life more manageable, and dollars go farther.

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Table 1
Major Elements of the Avance Program

First Year

Child age birth to two
Classes for mothers at Avance centers one morning a week for 36 weeks
Lectures on language and cognitive development of the child, discipline, child care, health and safety in the home, nutrition, etc.--one hour
Toy making--one hour
Lecture/discussion of community resources--one hour
Home visits--4 times
Day care provided
Transportation provided to center

Second Year

Counseling about educational and vocational abilities
Information about courses available
Transportation to courses
Daycare provided

Table 2
Enrollment Results By Site and Group

	Group					
	Program			Control		
	SS	WS	Total	SS	WS	Total
N	26	26	52	54	56	110
Enrolled In Classes	19	15	34	22	36	70
Percent Enrolled	73	58	65	41	13	33
Number in Each Type Of Class						
ESL	12	5	17	2	0	2
Pre-GED	1	0	1	2	0	2
GED	5	4	9	8	7	15
College	2	4	6	3	1	4
Citizenship	2	1	3	0	0	0

SS = Southside
WS = Westside
ESL = English as a Second Language
GED = General Equivalency Degree

Table 3
Correlations Predicting Course Enrollment by Site and Group

	Group			
	Program		Control	
	SS	WS	SS	WS
Mother's Age				.49
Mother's Education	.33	-.33		
Social Support:				
Utilized Network		-.41		
Negative Life Events		-.35		
Knowledge of Community Resources	.59			
Use of Community Resources				-.29
Progressive Values	-.33			
Traditional Values	-.34			-.23
Acculturation	.44			
CES-D Depression			.24	

Note: Taken classes was coded "1"; had not taken classes was coded "2".
SS = Southside
WS = Westside